

**CHARLES TAYLOR MASTER
MECHANIC'S AWARD**

**Fairbanks Flight Standards District
Office Honoree 2004**

HUGH A. KEITH



Keith, Hugh A. Hugh Keith was born November 22, 1935, and raised in Pinebluff, North Carolina. He remembers his interest in aviation started while watching the Army Airborne parachute and glider assault forces preparing for WW II. The Army training and maneuvers were being conducted in local farm fields and at the nearby Army airbase, Camp Macall. Also, he remembers he and his younger brother sometimes going with their mother, who was a volunteer, to the local two-story Civil Defense Tower to observe and identify aircraft flying in the area. Exciting stuff for small children, but no enemy were ever spotted.

During his school years, Hugh built and flew free flight model airplanes. In 1946, his uncle took him and his brother on their first airplane ride in his Taylorcraft. In Hugh's senior year in high school, he took flying lessons at the nearby grass airport at Pinehurst. The flying was done in a Funk model airplane, but not completed since money for lessons was hard to come by in those days.

Upon completing high school in 1954,

Hugh joined the Army to become a helicopter mechanic. He was trained as a Bell H-13 mechanic at the Gary Air Force Base near San Marcos, Texas. When the training was completed, he was sent to an Army base near Stuttgart, Germany. He served his three years there as a crew chief and mechanic on Sikorsky H-19 and H-34 rotorcraft. "That's the Army for you," he says, "train on Bell's, but actually work on the Sikorsky's." "The Army was a great experience," he says.

Upon leaving the Army, Hugh went to the Northrop Airframe and Powerplant School in Inglewood, California, graduating in December of 1958. In 1959, Hugh headed for Alaska, arriving in Fairbanks on February 17 on an airline Stratocruiser. He remembers that it was cold, dark, he was broke, and he didn't know a soul. He had written Wien Airlines earlier about a job, and they told him he had one if he showed up. They were good on their word, and he went to work the next day. He worked at Wien for the next 26 years, starting as a mechanic and working up to lead mechanic and inspector positions. While at Wien, Hugh worked on all of their aircraft, ranging from the Noorduyt Norseman to the Boeing jets.

During this period, many lifelong friends were made, and Wien was a great place to work. Hugh also got married and he and his wife, Lillian, raised five children. At last count, there are 17 grandchildren and five great-grandchildren, all of whom live in Alaska.

Sadly, Wien's operation was shut down in 1985. Hugh found part-time work at MarkAir, in Anchorage, working on their jet fleet. He then moved back to

Fairbanks and worked as Director of Maintenance, and later as Chief Inspector for a Fairchild F-27 cargo carrier named "Polor."

In the summer of 1986, Hugh was offered a job with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) as an Airworthiness Safety Inspector in the Fairbanks Flight Standards District Office (FSDO). Although he never seriously thought about working for the FAA, the offer was accepted, and this turned out to be another great job! Hugh worked for the next 17 years until his retirement in September of 2003. His primary duties with the FAA were certificating aircraft, mechanics, operators, accident investigation, and principal inspector assignments to air carriers. As with Wien, Hugh says many more friends were made while with the FAA, which made retiring not easy to do.

Although retired now, Hugh still keeps his Inspection Authorization current, and is doing some volunteer work as an Aviation Safety Counselor for the Fairbanks FSDO. He and his wife plan to continue to live in Fairbanks.